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Reaching Out to Christchurch

Reverend Mere Wallace writes:

Hui Amorangi o Te Waipounamu went into action after the Earthquake shook Canterbury. Bishop John Gray and his wife Helen, called in members of the Ministry Team to do pastoral care amongst the people who needed help desperately.

The Hui Amorangi Centre at Ferry Road became a distribution hub, from where water and food were distributed. The Ministry Team present spent time at centres assisting with catering for people, talking to them and just being a friend, through their actions they were doing God's deeds amongst the people. Good was truly at work through the many helpers, the listeners, the prayerful. I give thanks to God for the work that the team so graciously carried out.

Revd Mere Wallace is Tikanga Maori representative on the Council for the Centre of Anglican Women Studies and is a key member of Hui Amorangi o Te Waipounamu Ministry Team. In her 'spare time' she works as the Team Leader for Hokitika/South Westland Social Workers through the Hokitika Health Centre and was deeply involved with last years Pike River mining disaster.



St John's College sent a small group of senior students to Christchurch after the February quake in response to an invitation by Bishop John Gray of Te Waipounamu. We invited the women of this group, Megan Herles-Mooar, Amy Houben and Ellen Bernstein to offer their reflections on their time there and how having a benefit of theological education helped them cope with their ministry.

Megan Herles-Mooar writes:

Back in college a month after the February quake, I still find it hard to comprehend what it is that has happened to my home in Christchurch. I, like many, was initially traumatised by the news of the earthquake. We waited desperately for news from home, the extent of the devastation still unfolding in the city.

Under the weight of constant aftershocks, anxiety and sleep deprivation, it became increasingly apparent that coping mechanisms in Christchurch were crumbling. The opportunity to be a part of the St John's College relief team to the Maori Mission in Christchurch was an absolute gift.

Before moving to college, I had volunteered in social service agencies for over 20 years and knew the city well. However, the experience of ministering to community within the midst of an emergency, which in effect was still unfolding, challenged me anew to examine how I both experienced and reflected Christ in a disaster.

Although I had experienced the rolling aftershocks, and seen the impact on the city after the initial quake, nothing could prepare me for the shock of standing in front of my home church. There I was, holding in the palm of my hand, a piece of what was left of the building, the place where I had prayed I would one day be ordained.

In that moment of contemplation, standing on my sacred ground, my solid ground, the words of theologian Jon Sobrino flooded into my being:

“There is a lot to do when an earthquake strikes, but the first thing—without which nothing else we do is enough—is to let ourselves be affected by the tragedy, not to turn away or soften it. This is not a way of promoting masochism, or demanding what is psychologically impossible. It simply requires an initial moment of honesty toward the reality.”

(John Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*—New York: Orbis Books, 2004)



Surrendering that moment towards the honesty of what was occurring allowed me to be fully present in my ministry.

During my time in Christchurch, the full blessing of my experience of Clinical Pastoral Education became increasingly apparent. If for no other reason than the removal of my initial hesitation at being alongside people in trauma, I was exceedingly grateful for those days ministering in Middlemore's Psychiatric Unit. Yes, the physical building of my church has been reduced to rubble, but that little piece of it, which only I knew was resting in my pocket, became a touchstone as I worked for the next few days; my solid ground when meeting with those for whom there was little certainty. A gentle reminder perhaps, that though a building is a building, solid ground is not necessarily that on which I stand, but on that which is my sure footing in the realm of God. This love, that in those tired moments (when it would be easy to join those around me whom had fallen into quiet chaos and fear) is the love on which I firmly stand. That grounding faith, in those moments, holding me as I hold those fearful and uncertain, as we stand together on the solid ground of God's enduring love.

On the last night of our time in Christchurch I find myself once more standing in the grounds of my church with my father and my brother. In the last light of day is revealed the great church window, shining untouched through the rubble.



Ellen Bernstein writes:

The status of my 'sound theological education' is only under way, but as a year two student spending only a few days in Christchurch, I drew heavily on the Anglican Studies paper I had completed called Ministry with Christ: Pastoral Theology and Practice. Several models of conversation were presented in this paper, but the one I found most applicable both in my studies and in Christchurch was the narrative model.

This meant I was clear before I arrived that I was not bringing a box of answers, I hadn't smuggled in salvation, and I had left my elevated spiritual enlightenment at home. Instead, I knew it was okay for me to simply sit alongside people, to provide that "non-anxious presence" and to affirm the coping skills that people were able to articulate. Time and again, it was the person talking to me who chose to talk about God, often taking me by surprise. I'd done nothing but wear the largest cross I owned, and a lanyard that said Pastoral Care.

Oh and I'd smiled! It seemed to make a difference to everyone that some people had arrived from Auckland who weren't tired and disheartened. But that ASP paper was in the back of my mind the whole time.

Amy Houben writes:

Hands down the most essential skill a pastoral-carer can offer people during a time of crisis, is the ability to listen. It is not to preach, not to recite liturgy, not even to pray—but it is to be present—to meet another where they are, and in the midst of whatever is going on for them. It is to be other-centred.

My study of theology has ministered to my ability to offer pastoral care in a significant way. The two for me are forever intertwined.

My usefulness as a theologian rests on my ability to listen; my ability to be a listening presence for people rests on knowing that it is because God first listened to me. To study theology is to study a God who is intimately involved, a God who is present with us between the lines on a page and in the lives of those to whom we meet. I am indebted to God who through my theological studies has taken my ability to "be present" for people and plunged it into new depths. I strongly encourage others to give it a go.



*Such emotion bubbles up
on attempting to understand this trip
—this place
A liquefaction of competing thoughts—emotions
foreign, familiar
—pure and tainted.
Questions that few have the breath to answer
ambush the weary
demanding some logical pattern
amidst that which resists form.
How can one in such a place not ask what it is the land demands
when she rolls over in desperation
shaking loose the shackles of archaic churches
waking long dead church fathers.
To one born of old eyes
such questions find a safe harbour behind my teeth
until the only sound that feels safe leaving my mouth
—a lament, is cried into the ground.
“Where is your sacred ground?
Where is your place to stand?”
In the end all that can be done is to dig a hole
and give these questions up to the earth.
It is in the arms of God where solace is to be found in this place,
reflected in the at the end of a long day
through a pile of church rubble
a window unharmed displaying the colours
of God's enduring love.*

Megan Herles-Mooar

Women's Communication Rights: A reflection for International Women's Day 2011

By Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, Executive Director—femLINKPACIFIC (Fiji)

Turning forty-five this year may not seem like much of a lifetime but when one has grown up with political experiences dramatically different from that of my mother and grandmothers. My outlook on life has been influenced by the 3 types of coups – military (1987, 2006), political (2000) and even church based (1987) coups, which we have experienced in my country.

Who We Are, What we Do and Why:

The protracted cycle of political crises in a country with a complex governance structure – parallel traditional and parliamentary democracy structures have had a direct impact on the political status of women. While it has been suggested that conflicts create spaces which women could not previously influence, can we really expect a transformation of these barriers when the basic requirements for women's human security including economic security, personal security and political security are not met – where is the justice as long as political processes do not invest, empower and include women?

The real story is that the existing information-communication divides between urban and rural communities are getting wider and women's access to the power of information and communication is closely to their lack of economic security or power. For femLINKPACIFIC – THESE are the very women who need to be invested in when we talk about women's participation in decision making. Invisible are the women who manage their own households, or provide this service for others. Invisible are the mothers baking pies, making food parcels, creating floral arrangements and other income generating ideas. Invisible are the community workers.

FemLINKPACIFIC is a community media based feminist organisation. And since our establishment in post-coup Fiji in 2000, the development of a women-centred information-communication system, working across ethnic divides in our society, enabling women's voices to connect with policy makers, the bureaucracy and development partners and broader civil society from 'the safe space' of their home and communities, outside of the capital city, has been the core of our every day work. This has led to the development of a rural and regional media and policy network.

Guided by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) we have continued to advocate for full compliance of the resolution in all decisions to peace and security – through vigils, community radio broadcasts and other local and external media initiatives, as well as policy interventions.

Our work makes the connection with, or serves to address the limited access to formal spaces of decision-making, women in Fiji continue to have limited access to public spaces for *women's communications*, which remain defined by the existing patriarchy of power, including the power of the corporate media. Subsequently access to information and communications channels, particularly the affordability to use new technology, such as the internet remains the privilege of a few even though Fiji has adopted the "global policy agenda on gender equality" the Beijing Platform for Action.

Ultimately we have recognised the real need to contribute to making a connection between human rights-human security-human development including for women so there can be some solid linkages between "the theory" and the people's / women's realities and while relating these realities women use the language of human security, they are addressing their human rights or their right to gender inclusive development. The women's peace and human security findings are an opportunity to address some of the root causes of conflict and insecurities, from the home and community level, to contribute to strengthening current efforts to prevent the resurgence of conflicts and violence.

Our Suitcase Radio Station:

In 2004, we established a women's mobile community radio station - FemTALK 89.2FM, which it has been taking radio out to rural and semi-urban women around Fiji providing them with an opportunity speak on issues concerning them but also suggest how these issues could be solved. It was also about challenging the status quo of existing decision-making structures in Fiji by enabling women, especially those from the rural areas and the poor to speak openly on common matters but it also involved



Our musings about these questions gave rise to femLINKPACIFIC's Generation Next Project. Since 2004 femLINKPACIFIC has trained more than 70 young women, and through an annual training programme young women are further equipped in skills to produce in-depth features as well as become more knowledgeable on the regulatory, programming and management aspects of the community radio station. The young women who have participated in the programme are both in-school girls, and those who have had to leave school, they are girls who are finding their identity and role in their communities and society as well young women who need a safe space to discuss and communicate their priority issues, especially after having dealt with our country's political realities, particularly since the military coup of December 2006.

In 2010, femLINKPACIFIC has also recruited through our rural women's media network a team of Generation Next members in Labasa and Nadi -- two of our main rural centres. The focus for 2011 onwards is to build the capacity of the Suva and rural members to be **core producers of media content** in support of our rural networks in Labasa/Savusavu, Nadi and Suva/Nausori as well as provide coverage and deepen their understanding of key policy related activities linked to femLINKPACIFIC's own priorities in the capital city (e.g. being assigned to "cover" events and also contribute femLINKPACIFIC input from our policy reports/recommendations.)

Conclusion:

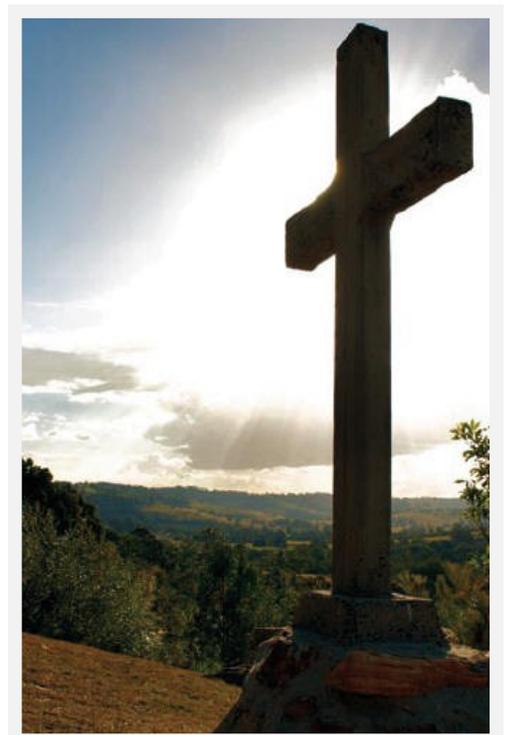
Ultimately our vibrant women's media and policy network, using the suitcase radio continues to demonstrate the potential for community media, including community radio, as a critical bridge between rural and urban communities, giving voice to women, serving as a channel of information and communication for the marginalized and thereby assisting in the increasing awareness of the feminisation of poverty by continuing to link women's voices and issues through a range of media and policy initiatives, connected to critical international women's human rights commitments and conventions including the Beijing Platform of Action, UN Convention of the Elimination of all form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

In the coming months we are looking forward to working with our partner organisations in Tonga to assist in the establishment of a women's-run community radio station in Nukualofa this year.

This is what community radio is all about. It is about giving voice to the voiceless, being a communication channel for the marginalized and demonstrating the possibility of the democratization of information and communication channels within societies – This is what our work is about.

International Women's Day is marked on March 8 every year. Nowadays this is a major day of global celebration of women. In different regions the focus of the celebrations ranges from general celebration of respect, appreciation and love towards women to a celebration for women's economic, political and social achievements. In many regions the original political and human rights theme designated by the United Nations runs strong, and political and social awareness of the struggles of women worldwide are brought out and examined in a hopeful manner. (Wikipedia)

*Easter Blessings
Sisters in Christ*



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The Women's Studies Centre was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

**New Email
Address**

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.



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